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AUTHOR Zela-Koort, Monica P.; Nardine, Frank E.
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ABSTRACT

This report examines parent-involvement programs that focus on Hispanic families and the methods that have been used to evaluate these programs. The survey involved 10 Hispanic parent-involvement programs named by various state education agency directors as being significant. Particular attention was given to whether or not the programs were formally evaluated. The programs, located in Texas, New Mexico, Washington, and Florida, were diverse in client populations, although each served a significant number of Hispanics. The study indicated a total of 29 different parent-involvement activities reported by the 10 programs. Of these, the most often used were parent workshops or courses, parent-teacher conferences, and parent advisory councils. The least prevalent activities included providing incentive grants to develop parent involvement activities locally, parent-teacher conference improvement courses, and parent resource centers. The most prevalent ways that districts evaluated their parent-involvement programs were: (1) parent opinion surveys; (2) monitoring the frequency of activities; and (3) monitoring parent attendance at events and activities. Three school districts conducted formal evaluations, five conducted informal evaluations, and two reported no evaluations. The document concludes with a discussion of program evaluation procedures and the need for documentation of program activities. It suggests that an important key in narrowing the educational gap between majority and minority groups lies in the development of effective parent-involvement programs. The document includes 15 references. (TES)

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AN EVALUATION OF HISPANIC-AMERICAN PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS

Monica P. Zela-Koort, Frank E. Nardine
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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An Evaluation of Hispanic-American Parent Involvement Programs

Over the last twenty years the parent involvement movement has evolved from a few, scattered, isolated activities to schools, districts and, in some instances, even statewide programs. Federal support and legislation, as Epstein (1984) points out, have provided the main impetus for local and district to develop various kinds and forms of home-school collaboration. More recently, and somewhat belatedly despite federal mandate and encouragement, a few states have instituted state-wide policies, created program incentives and offered substantial technical assistance. An initial observation made by Epstein (1987) and more recently substantiated by Nardine, Chapman and Moles (1989), that a majority of the states still offer "...mainly symbolic, verbal support for the importance of parent involvement..." aptly characterized the present status of parent involvement nationwide. Interestingly, the primary motivation for parent involvement seems to originate from the local level, which may, in part, account for both the lack of systematic research and equally important the paucity of dissemination of information concerning important parent involvement projects, programs, and activities.

Research into minority parent involvement activity, specifically within the Hispanic community, is sparse and existing programs are underreported. The Hispanic population is the second largest minority group in the United States today, and its numbers keep growing. Demographic trends indicate that Hispanics will surpass Blacks by the year 2020 (Hodgkinson, 1985). These data, combined with the facts that this minority group represents the highest high school drop-out rate, achieves the lowest standardized test scores, and is over-represented in remedial tracks, strongly suggest that resources should be allocated to ensure that Hispanic youngsters stay in school and acquire intellectual competencies.

Researchers report that minority parents are the most likely to feel hesitant about interacting with teachers and schools (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988) and that Hispanics are particularly reticent about involvement because the Hispanic culture does not encourage parent participation in children's education (Hispanic Policy Development Project, 1988; Lynch & Stein, 1987). Consequently, Hispanic families in general seem to be less knowledgeable about their children's educational programs and less involved than parents of both Black and Caucasian youngsters in the same programs (Lynch & Stein, 1987).

As the workforce becomes more dependent on Hispanic and other minorities, the nation is placing more emphasis on bridging the education gap between them and mainstream America. Henderson (1987) underscores the critical connection between student achievement and home-school collaboration yet cautions that while involving low-income parents in the education of their children does improve student achievement, these children still tend to perform below average. There is, however, a growing body of research (Bermudez & Padron, 1988) that suggests that involving Hispanic parents in school activities of their children has educational pay off. Furthermore, an intervention project (Comer, 1988) at two inner city schools, with a 99 percent Black population, showed that it is possible to surpass the national average and decrease behavior problems in prominently minority schools by fostering positive interaction between parents and school staff.

There is a paucity of information documenting what kinds of programs exist focusing on Hispanic and other minority home-school connections, what methods were used to evaluate them, and what impact, if any, they had on subsequent programs. The present survey and analysis underscored the important need for systematic description and evaluation of parent involvement programs, especially those with a minority focus. Specifically, the objectives of this study were first

to contact Hispanic parent involvement programs which were nominated as significant, and to analyze and describe why they were deemed significant. Particular attention was given to whether or not the programs were formally evaluated.

Procedure and Methodology

The present study was conducted as a part of a larger research project investigating the extent individual state education agencies promoted parent involvement (Nardine, et al., 1989). State directors of educational agencies were asked to nominate significant local or district parent involvement programs within their respective state. A total of 48 school systems was nominated by these state administrators. Letters were sent to appropriate district superintendents, program directors or other education officials requesting information about their parent involvement programs and details of evaluation efforts undertaken. Twenty-six responses were received, and of these ten (10) were identified as fulfilling the requisite Hispanic criteria. These ten programs represented four different states -- Texas, New Mexico, Washington, and Florida.

The districts which comprised this study served a wide variety of constituent populations ranging from rural middle class communities to poor urban families; from native American families of Mexican or Spanish descent indigenous to the locality to recent immigrants. The parent involvement

activities reported by the individual districts were components of and funded by at least one of the following programs: Chapter One, Chapter One Migrant, Bilingual Education, or Basic Education for Limited English Proficient Students (BELEPS). Five of the school districts were fully or partially funded by Chapter One, six districts received Chapter One/Migrant funds, two districts reported to have Bilingual Education programs, and the BELEPS program was specific to one of the school districts.

Of the ten districts, two of the parent involvement programs reported having been in existence since the late 1960's, one for the last fifteen years, three for the last ten years, one for the last three years, and one for the last two years. The remaining two programs did not report the length of time their respective programs were in operation. Six of the school programs served Hispanic populations residing in a large metropolitan area. Three of the programs served mainly migrant families living in agricultural communities, and one district served a primarily middle class rural community.

Results

Results of the present study indicate that parent involvement programs with a significant population of Hispanics comprised a wide variety of activities and evaluated their programs in similar ways. Table 1 illustrates the most

common types of parent involvement activities found in the schools. A total of 29 different parent involvement activities were reported by the ten programs. The most prevalent activities in the ten Hispanic programs (using a criterion of seven or more) were: (1) parent workshops, seminars, or courses in which some form of technical assistance was provided; (2) parent/teacher conferences; (3) parent advisory counsels; (4) parent training in strengthening home learning activities; (5) material development such as, brochures, handbooks, and information pamphlets, for use by parents; (6) parent assistance in helping children with school assignments at home; (7) bilingual communication; (8) parent assistance in evaluating the schools' instructional programs; and (9) parent assistance in establishing educational goals of the school.

The least prevalent activities found in the ten programs (using a criterion of three or less) were: (1) providing demonstration or incentive grants to develop parent involvement activities locally; (2) offering assistance to parents and teachers concerning ways to improve conferences to benefit children; (3) conducting formal evaluations of parent involvement programs/activities; (4) establishing parent resource centers and (5) creating a take-home computer program; (6) training teachers involved how to nurture and promote parent involvement in workshops and (7) conducting

in-service training; (8) developing standards for in-service training of teachers and/or administrators regarding aspects of parent involvement; and (9) creating recognition programs for outstanding local parent involvement activities.

Table 2 summarizes the ways in which the districts evaluated their programs. The most prevalent evaluation methods used were (1) surveys from parent participants concerning their opinions about specific activities, (2) frequency of parent involvement activities, and (3) parent attendance at activities/workshops/ events. Of the ten programs, three of the school districts stated that formal evaluations of their programs had been conducted, five reported that informal evaluations had been conducted, and two did not report program evaluation of any kind.

Formal evaluations by the three districts (A, C, H) consisted of parent attendance and participation in activities and their degree of satisfaction concerning these experiences. For example, parents were asked for their opinions about training sessions they attended, about the efficiency of parent advisory meetings, and about their views on the overall success of particular programs and activities. Parents were also asked for suggestions on how the district could improve activities and meetings.

Additionally, district A reported the total number of volunteer hours donated by parents and assessed the degree to which the goals and expectations of their home instruction program were met. For example, two of the main goals of their home instruction included providing support for the "at risk" family in order to ensure a more positive home and school relationship and to encourage parent participation in the education of their children. The district reported that their goals had been met, but information on how they came to that conclusion was not provided.

The results of canvassing the participants in the parent involvement programs, the attendance, and number of activities conducted throughout the year were written up in district reports as part of their Chapter One and/or Chapter One Migrant annual requirement. Overall the results reported by the three districts indicated that parents found training sessions helpful and the districts deemed themselves successful in providing parents with information about programs and activities. The information in the reports did not provide extensive details or descriptions of what comprised the workshops, training programs, and home school interactions.

Informal evaluations of parent involvement were reported by five of the districts (B, D, E, F, and I). These evaluations were similar to the three districts indicating

formal program evaluation had occurred based on parent responses to surveys and questionnaires about activities they attended. Three of the districts (B, F, I) also based the evaluation of their programs on the number of parents who participated in the parent activities sponsored by the district. School districts F and I performed annual needs assessments (but failed to indicate how the results were utilized) and districts B and F reported the yearly number of parent volunteers. District F also stated that at a later date the progress of students whose parents participated in parent advisory council activities would be compared with those students whose parents did not participate. Two (B, D) of the five districts reported that they believed their parent involvement programs were successful without supporting data.

In comparing the districts which reported formal evaluation procedures with those reporting informal evaluation procedures, it can be seen that no clear distinction exists. That is, surveys and participant attendance were variously called formal and informal. Thus, based on these Hispanic programs what constitutes formal and informal evaluation is somewhat arbitrary.

Discussion

Based on a limited and highly select sample of ten Hispanic parent involvement programs, the following tentative conclusions are offered. First, it is evident that there is

considerable variation in the descriptions and evaluations of the programs. These ten programs may well fit what Jacobs (1988) calls a "new genre of grassroots programs...." She points out many parent involvement programs, by their nature, do not readily accommodate existing outcome measure instrumentation.

All ten programs seem to meet or exceed the minimum federally mandated parent involvement requirements for their respective programs. What is difficult to discern is how the various programs evolved, and what kinds of interventions occurred as the programs unfolded. Although many parent involvement components (e.g., parent/teacher conferences, reporting to parents on child's progress, soliciting parents' suggestions in the planning, development, and operation of the program) are mandated because they are funded by federal and state compensatory programs (Nardine et al., 1989), monitoring is the exception rather than the rule. Regular monitoring could be a decided asset if it provided on-going feedback or evaluation to aid program administrators to reach their defined goals.

Jacobs states that the goal of evaluation is to be "used by its intended audience" rather than solely for academic publication. At the very least it is regrettable that more definitive documentation is not a regular part of Hispanic parent involvement programs. In part, this is a critical need

in this area because not enough is known about what kinds of parent involvement are effective in Hispanic communities. Little attention has been given to cross-cultural and cross-racial differences and how they relate to parent involvement programs (Slaughter & Kuehne, 1987). These researchers state that "parent involvement is complex and multidimensional" and differences in family patterns will appear both between and within cultures, therefore, educators must account for the diversity when planning parent involvement programs.

Therefore, it seems apparent no one program will work for every school district. On the surface districts may appear to be dealing with the same type of parents, but in fact this may not be true. For example, two school districts may have large percentages of Mexican-American students. However; one may have a majority of recent immigrant, migrant families, and the other a population of third and fourth generation of mainstream Americans. The needs, concerns and goals of the two districts undoubtedly would be quite different. Given that the current demographic trends predict a majority public school population of "minorities" in the near future (Hodgkinson, 1986), to be effective parent involvement programs must be developed by educators that work for various ethnically and racially diverse families.

Substantial, formal evaluation was not a prominent characteristic of the ten Hispanic parent involvement programs reviewed although attempts at evaluation were evident in most of them. Evaluation is complicated, demanding, and requires special skills, adequate funding and trained personnel or consultants. The Hispanic programs under review seemed to be occupied in developing and providing aid and training to parents. That is, their energy and resources were expended in program development to ensure the best possible services to parents. While some of the programs were in existence for a considerable period of time, from the descriptions provided they, appeared to be continually changing and not fully established.

Fully established programs which are adequately funded can be subjected to evaluation more readily than fledging or changing ones. Additionally, in the absence of adequate program evaluation objectives, it is difficult or impossible to determine the effectiveness of parent involvement activities unless proper documentation occurs. That is, realistic goals must be established. Services provided or delivered must be detailed and program/activity implementation must be fully described. This kind of documentation can serve as a basis for new programs and replication.

In an article advocating more intensive involvement of low-income parents in school activities, McLaughlin & Shields (1987) suggest that descriptions of parent involvement activities will help to motivate educators to explore new and creative ways to foster meaningful parent involvement. According to these researchers, far too many educators provide inadequate and/or insufficient attention to developing time-tested procedures that would contribute to useful and generalizable practices. Detailed evaluation reports on specific programs including: (1) detailed descriptions of parent involvement activities; (2) the populations targeted; (3) operation costs; and (4) evaluation techniques will eliminate the need for future program directors and policy makers to start from the ground up. In the absence of adequate documentation of parent involvement programs designed specifically for low income groups, program planners will be hindered because they will be unable to learn from the successes and failures of their predecessors.

It is important to realize that evaluation is developmental. Jacobs (1988) offers a five-tiered approach to program evaluation which appears to be realistic and achievable. Progressing to successive tiers in large measure is contingent upon available resources. The model provides a

sequential evaluation roadmap. The evaluation level that is utilized by a particular program will, in part, depend upon experience, resources, and program stability.

Each of the five levels of evaluation requires that program analysts engage in certain activities in order to collect specific types of data. Each level has its own purpose, targets a particular audience, and is referred to by a descriptive title. For example, the first level of the five-tiered program is referred to as the "Preimplementation tier". At this level Jacobs (1988) suggests that basic characteristics of a proposed program be reported and needs assessments conducted so that the program can then be revised to fit the needs of the target population. This stage is necessary in order to validate the need to potential funders and community groups and to provide a groundwork for the program.

The second level, or the "Accountability tier", requires that the program, the participants, and the services provided be systematically described. In addition, accurate cost information per unit of service should be reported. This tier targets funders and community leaders in order to justify the expenditures required to run the program and secure additional funds. These first two tiers are within the reach of almost any program and are necessary for minimum accountability. The objectives of the remaining three tiers are to improve the

program, document its effectiveness, and to contribute to the knowledge and development of program models worthy of replication, respectively. The sequence Jacobs advocates needs to be more widely known and utilized.

To help disseminate information on how to evaluate parent involvement programs, as well as the descriptions of the programs themselves and any other information or resources that would aid in the development or improvement of parent involvement programs, Epstein (1987) suggests the establishment of a clearinghouse, library, and dissemination office for parent involvement practices and research. This would support educators in the implementation and maintenance of their local programs and encourage etablished programs to share what they have learned with others who have similar concerns. Schools can then pass helpful information on to the parents and assist them in processing the information. Pell ([Bryant interview], 1989) states that minority parents in particular are not getting the information they need to help their children succeed and that it is the duty of the schools to help them obtain this knowledge.

An important key in narrowing the educational gap between majority and minority groups lies in the development of stable and effective parent involvement programs. Effective programs are highly associated with student achievement and later school success. They provide parents with practical ways to

assist and support their children's educational endeavors. The value of learning is reinforced and encouraged. Hispanic programs in particular need to be developed, systematically studied and reported in order that what works can be shared.

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TABLE 1

FREQUENCY OF REPORTED PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Recognition Prgrms for P.I.				X						
Standards for Staff Inservice			X							
P.I. Inservice Training			X							
Workshops for School Personnel			X							
Take-Home Computer Program						X				
Parent Resource Centers				X			X			
Formal Evaluations of P.I.	X		X					X		
Tips for P/T Conferences		X		X		X				
Demo Grants for P.I. Activities		X		X				X		
Periodic Newsletters	X		X			X	X			
Parent Volunteers in School	X	X	X		X	X				
Parent Volunteers in Class	X	X	X			X				
Parents Involving other Parents	X	X	X		X					
Inform Parents of Child Progress	X		X		X		X			
Coordinate Community Grps/w P.I.	X			X	X			X	X	
Home Visits	X	X	X		X	X				
Other Forms of Assistance	X	X		X	X	X	X			
Parents Attend Schl Activities	X	X	X	X	X				X	
Distribute P.I. Materials/Info	X	X	X	X	X		X			
Parents Id Needs/Problems of Schl	X	X		X	X	X		X		
Parents Establish School Goals	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		
Parents Help Evaluate Instr. Prgm	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		
Help Parents Assist Child w/Hmwk	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
Bilingual Communication	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Develop Materials for Parents	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Trng in Home Lrng Activities	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Parent Advisory Counsils	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Parent/Teacher Conferences	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parent Workshops/Courses	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

* P.I. = Parent Involvement

TABLE 2

PROGRAM EVAUATION METHODS

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Compare Student Progress(planned)						X				
Assess Goals	X									
Needs Assessments						X			X	
Record # of Hours Volunteered/ # of Parent Volunteers	X	X				X				
Compare Atten. Rates to Previous Years		X	X			X		X		
Parent Participation in Activities	X	X	X			X		X	X	
Frequency of P.I. Activities	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	
Reaction Surveys from Parents	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		

*P.I. = Parent Involvement

END

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